

Characteristics of the Eighth-Grade Syndrome in Students at an Internationalized Alternative School in South Korea - Focusing on Comparisons with Public School Students

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to measure and compare the extent of 8th-grade syndrome among students in internationalized alternative schools and public schools to determine how differences in educational environments affect 8th-grade syndrome. The Eighth Grade Syndrome Scale(EGSS), a scale developed by Cho(2017), was used to measure 8th-grade syndrome. The results showed that internationalized alternative schools had a significantly lower mean EGSS score than public schools. Among the sub-factors, other-dependent narcissism had the highest mean value in both types of schools. In terms of sex differences, male students in internationalized alternative schools had a higher mean EGSS score than female students. Regardless of the type of school, grade 8 was the most affected by the 8th-grade syndrome. As a result of these findings, it appears that in internationalized alternative schools, the school environment plays a significant role in reducing the prevalence of 8th-grade syndrome.

Keywords: 8th-grade disease, 8th-grade syndrome, chunibyoo, internationalized alternative school, public school

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I. INTRODUCTION

8th-grade disease is a very characteristic term for adolescent middle schoolers in South Korea. The term refers to the problematic behavior of adolescents who are out of control and acting on their own whims, and the implication is that the second year of middle school is the peak of this behavior. 8th-grade disease is sometimes referred to as a "disease" because of the problematic behaviors and emotions that cross the line. In addition, the pretentiousness and excessive narcissism that are common among students at this age are often viewed in an unfavorable light by the public. This is not only true in South Korea, but also around the world. In the United States, this period is referred to as the "storm and stress" period, and it has been found that the phenomenon is most extreme around the same time as the second year of middle school in Korea(Reed Larson and Mark Ham, 1993). Considering the trend that the crime rate of juveniles has been increasing since 2012, it can be seen that delinquent behavior and various forms of deviance among middle school students are becoming a social problem(Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2015).

This is the time when secondary sex characteristics are activated, and many adolescents experience a rapid increase in hormonal secretions, a lack of self-control, and delusions of grandeur. As a result, adolescents who are suffering from adolescence are overly expressive of their individuality and act as if they are living in their own world alone. As such, adolescence is a time of great physical and emotional changes that coincide with the secondary sexual phase, but there is a social and cultural background that cannot be explained by the adolescent's physical problems alone.

Cho(2017) conceptualized 8th-grade disease as an 8th-grade syndrome and noted that its causes include the socio-cultural background of the country and the background of the educational environment, and in the case of Korea, the background of the educational environment is critical. The second year of middle school is an important time to prepare for high school, and unlike the first year, when the free semester system is implemented, students are faced with the academic burden of many subjects, test preparation, and assignments for the first time. In addition to academic achievement, students also face the challenges of self-identity and self-confidence development due to expectations and comparisons about appearance, popularity, and friendships. It can be seen that entrance-oriented education, excessive competition, and difficulties in forming relationships with friends all take place in the educational environment of the school(Lee, 2014; Jung et al., 2015).

To overcome these problems, a number of so-called internationalized alternative schools have been established and operated to provide an alternative to the competition-oriented entrance examination education of

Korean public education, to promote holistic education, and to educate students according to Western academic disciplines such as cooperation, communication, presentation, and debate rather than arithmetic grades. Students educated in these schools experience a freer and more autonomous education than in public schools and are highly satisfied with their academic achievements(Kang, 2018). As both public schools and internationalized alternative schools are located in the same country, South Korea, the socio-cultural background is the same, but the background of the educational environment is different, so the degree and characteristics of the 8th-grade syndrome experienced by students in each school may be different.

The purpose of this study is to measure and compare the extent of the 8th-grade syndrome among students in internationalized alternative schools and public schools. In doing so, this study aim to determine how differences in educational environments affect 8th-grade syndrome in students with the same sociocultural background.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Concept and Characteristics of 8th-grade syndrome

The 8-grade syndrome derives from the word Chunibyoo, which first appeared on a Japanese TBS radio program in 1990(Shimoda et al., 2021; Yu and Choi, 2022). The program host referred to Chunibyoo as a gag to introduce an episode in which radio listeners described a young person in the second year of middle school who was getting cringeworthy(Koji, 2014). "Chuni" means the 8th-grade period, and "byoo" means a disease; therefore, chunibyoo is translated into "8th-grade disease". After the broadcast, the term chunibyoo spread rapidly through the Internet and entered Korea.

In the early days of its introduction into Korea, it had a somewhat positive connotation, representing rebelliousness and recklessness, but also ambition(representing the innocent behavior of adolescent teenagers). However, over time, the negative connotations of violence, rebellion, indiscipline, and uncontrollability have become popularized and are increasingly seen as a social problem(Kim, 2016).

On the other hand, Cho(2017) established the concept and characteristics of 8th-grade syndrome academically. She conceptualized the complex characteristics of early adolescence as a 'syndrome' as a specific phenomenon rather than a 'pathological' condition. Therefore, unlike puberty, which focuses on physical changes in early adolescents, the characteristics of psychological, emotional, and behavioral changes in early adolescence, culminating in the second year of middle school, are named 'the 8th-grade syndrome'(Kim, 2016). Typical characteristics of the 8th-grade syndrome include dysfunctional impulsivity(Kang, 1994), and low tolerance for anger(Lee, 2011). Dysfunctional impulsivity refers to the tendency to react quickly but impulsively, resulting in inaccurate and erroneous responses due to an inability to control impulses(Dickman, 1990). Low tolerance for anger is a characteristic of early adolescence that is characterized by 'turbulence'(Hall, 1904). It refers to the lack of control of anger in response to turbulent psychological and emotional dissatisfaction and frustration(Lee and Kwak, 2000). These characteristics of 8th-grade syndrome lead to problematic behaviors, which negatively affect academic achievement and character development.

2.2 Internationalized Alternatives school

It has been criticized that public education has been reduced to a process for university admission, and the function of holistic education such as morality and ethics has been lost long ago. As such, alternatives are being sought to restore the essence of education that has been lost in the public education system, and meaningful educators are trying to establish various types of alternative schools to provide true education(Kang, 2002).

So, what is an alternative school? When limited to the legal scope, it is a school that provides various types of education such as experience-oriented education such as fieldwork, character-oriented education, or education for the development of individual aptitudes and aptitudes for students who drop out of school or want to receive an education that suits their personal characteristics. In the 1990s, alternative schools were mainly a measure for students who dropped out of public education(Kang, 2002), but since, the characteristics of alternative schools have also been diversifying according to various educational needs. Above all, it is noteworthy that alternative schools are not simply schools for educational misfits who have dropped out of conventional public education, but rather are being transformed into schools for higher educational goals.

As human society enter the 21st century of globalization, alternative schools are also becoming more internationalized. This study focuses on internationalized alternative schools. Nam(2009) defined an internationalized alternative school as an educational institution that improves foreign language communication skills and strengthens global cultural understanding and character education in order to meet the educational demands of the internationalization trend. In other words, internationalized alternative schools provide higher quality education compared to public schools and are recognized as an educational institution that presupposes entrance to foreign universities.

Currently, there are many types of alternative schools in Korea. There are various alternative schools based on the educational values of their respective beliefs, such as alternative schools for failures in public

education, abandoned and troubled children, parents' enthusiasm for true education, alternative schools out of necessity, and alternative schools centered on religion such as Christianity to cultivate good character and character.

Limited to the legal scope, there are only 32 alternative schools authorized under Article 60.3(Alternative Schools) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 2018, and a total of 71 alternative schools, including 39 specialized schools for alternative education that are commonly perceived as alternative schools. In comparison, there are 287 unauthorized alternative schools confirmed to be operating in 2018.

However, most of these schools are not authorized, so they have to prepare for the GED separately from college entrance exams, and the educational philosophy and beliefs of alternative schools do not meet the government's educational standards, so there are far more unauthorized alternative schools than authorized ones and many of them do not disclose information about their status, and some do not even register, so it is very difficult to grasp the overall status of alternative schools. In the end, these alternative schools face the problem of having to prepare for the SAT like public schools for domestic entrance exams. Therefore, in the era of internationalization, internationalized alternative schools that combine holistic education based on foreign, especially American, disciplines are gaining prominence.

2.3 Relationship between school environment and 8th-grade syndrome

School takes up a very large part of an adolescent's existence in terms of time spent and relationships (Hashmi, 2013). In addition, due to their immature nature, adolescents are more likely to be tempted to engage in risky health behaviors such as smoking, drinking, or drug use during school, and tend to act impulsively due to peer pressure(Cho and Chu, 2014). In other words, the development of emotions and behaviors during adolescence is highly dependent on the school environment. After all, dysfunctional impulsivity and a low tolerance for anger, the hallmark traits of 8th-grade syndrome, are closely related to school life.

A keyword analysis of the text of a press article by Hwang, Mae-Hyang, et al.(2022) found that words related to academics and advancement were highly correlated with middle school illness. This indicates that Korea's highly competitive SAT and college entrance examination system is a significant contributor to 8th-grade syndrome.

However, students in internationalized alternative schools experience a somewhat different schooling and admissions system than students in traditional schools. International schools offer an American academic curriculum, a holistic moral and ethical education, and a strong emphasis on religious (mostly Christian) faith-based education. The free and self-directed curricular and extracurricular activities of internationalized alternative schools reduce the anxiety of academic competition, and the faith and character education of Christian-affiliated schools, which account for the majority of alternative schools, is acting as a positive change driver in adolescence(Kang, 2018). In addition, the "internationality" of internationalized alternative schools reduces friction among students by fostering inclusiveness, which leads to a positive understanding of cultural differences(Shim, 2023). In addition, the very close relationships between teachers and students are a major contributor to student satisfaction(Seo, 2017).

Therefore, it can be hypothesized that students in internationalized alternative schools, where the school environment and entrance examination system are different from public schools, and overall school satisfaction is higher than in general schools, will have different aspects of secondary school syndrome than students in public schools.

III. METHOD

3.1 Study Design

The purpose of this study is to measure and compare the extent of the 8th-grade syndrome among students in internationalized alternative schools and public schools to determine how differences in educational environments affect 8th-grade syndrome. The Eighth Grade Syndrome Scale(EGSS), a scale developed by Cho(2017), was used to measure 8th-grade syndrome. The scale consists of reliable and valid items to measure the syndrome, and the results showed that the mean value was highest in the eighth grade compared to the seventh and ninth grades.

3.2 Setting and Samples

For the study, I surveyed students in grades 7, 8, and 9 of public middle schools and internationalized alternative schools in Gyeonggi-do and Seoul. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed to students and 438(87.6%) were returned, of which 420(84%) were used for analysis, excluding 18 that were insincere.

Table 1. General characteristics and differences of samples

	Level	n	%
school	Intl.	175	0.417
	Public	245	0.583
grade	7	129	0.307
	8	166	0.395
	9	125	0.298
sex	F	213	0.507
	M	207	0.493

Intl.: Internationalized alternative school, Public: Public middle school, n: number

3.3 Measurement

The Eighth Grade Syndrome Scale (EGSS), developed by Cho (2017), is divided into six sub-factors: secondary individuation, ideal self-awareness, other-dependent narcissism, dysfunctional impulsivity, exaggerated self-presentation, and low tolerance to anger, as shown in Table 2, and each theme consists of a total of 38 questions with 2-14 questions. Respondents answered each question on a 5-point Likert scale.

The results of the reliability analysis of the questions are shown in Table 3. The Cronbach's Alpha value, which can be used to judge reliability, was found to be above 0.7. Therefore, all survey variables in this study were judged to be reliable.

Table 2. EGSS questions

<p>secondary individuation</p> <p>Q1. I don't talk to my parents as much as I used to. Q2. I feel uncomfortable with my parents' skinship. Q3. I feel dissatisfied with my family. Q4. I like my friends better than my family. Q5. I want to travel with my friends more than my family. Q6. I feel more comfortable sharing my worries with my friends than with my family. Q7. I feel more comfortable when my family is not at home. Q8. I don't like it when my family comes into my room.</p>	<p>exaggerated self-presentation</p> <p>Q21. I often express my opinions spontaneously. Q22. I make promises spontaneously and regret it. Q23. I buy things impulsively. Q24. I often make up my mind without thinking carefully. Q25. I sometimes act without thinking and regret it. Q26. I often act without thinking about the consequences. Q27. I think it is sometimes cool to be a bully or a gangster. Q28. I think it is sometimes cool to punch a wall or spit on it. Q29. I think it's sometimes cool to spit out words without knowing what they mean. Q30. I think it's cool to use slang in some cases. Q31. I think kids who rebel against their teachers are sometimes cool. Q32. I think it is sometimes cool to wear trendy makers. Q33. I think model students sometimes look stuffy and nerdy. Q34. I sometimes talk as if there was a big wound in the past.</p>
<p>ideal self-awareness</p> <p>Q9. I seem to think more deeply. Q10. I seem to recognize my friends' moods better. Q11. I feel like I know a lot of things regardless of my schoolwork. Q12. I feel like I am better than my friends in certain areas. Q13. My friends value my opinion more than theirs.</p>	
<p>other-dependent narcissism</p> <p>Q14. I am very sensitive to changes in my body. Q15. I am very conscious of what others think of me. Q16. I want people around me to recognize me as a pretty good person. Q17. I hate it when I look nerdy in front of others. Q18. I want other people to think I'm good-looking (pretty).</p>	<p>low tolerance to anger</p> <p>Q35. I don't have a good tolerance for when my parents make me angry. Q36. I have a hard time keeping my temper when my friends make me angry. Q37. I find it hard to control my anger when things don't go my way. Q38. I can't stand it when others criticize me.</p>
<p>dysfunctional impulsivity</p> <p>Q19. I believe I can do anything if I set my mind to it. Q20. I often imagine myself saving someone from a dangerous situation.</p>	

Table 3. Reliability Analysis

factor	Numbers of questionnaire	Cronbach's α
secondary individuation	8	.938
ideal self-awareness	5	.740
other-dependent narcissism	5	.788
dysfunctional impulsivity	2	.873
exaggerated self-presentation	14	.916
low tolerance to anger	4	.908

3.4 Statistical Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using Jamovi Program, a statistical analysis program. Jamovi is an R-based interface that is very easy to enter and operate, and it is also a very powerful tool that is capable of conducting various statistical analyses (Şahin and Aybek, 2019).

First, frequency analysis was conducted and presented to analyze the demographic characteristics of the general survey participants. Next, descriptive statistics such as the mean and standard deviation of the survey variables were analyzed in the results. Finally, t-tests were conducted to analyze differences in EGSS means by school and gender, and ANOVAs were conducted to analyze differences in EGSS means by grade level.

IV. ANALYSIS RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics Analysis of EGSS

The results of the descriptive statistics analysis of EGSS are shown in Table 4. The total mean is 2.92, the total mean of internationalized alternative schools is 2.61, and the total mean of public schools is 3.15. The ranking of the six EGSS sub-factors of internationalized alternative schools is that other-dependent narcissism has the highest mean of 3.33, followed by dysfunctional impulsivity (mean 3.01), ideal self-awareness (mean 2.99), secondary individuation (mean 2.65), low tolerance to anger (mean 2.27), and exaggerated self-presentation (mean 2.24). The ranking of the six EGSS sub-factors in public schools was highest for other-dependent narcissism with a mean of 3.91, followed by secondary individuation with a mean of 3.32, ideal self-awareness with a mean of 3.23, dysfunctional impulsivity with a mean of 3.16, low tolerance to anger with a mean of 2.99, and exaggerated self-presentation with a mean of 2.78.

Table 4. Descriptive Analysis

factor	Total	Intl.	Public
	Mean(SD)	Mean(SD)	Mean(SD)
secondary individuation	3.04(1.26)	2.65(1.20)	3.32(1.22)
ideal self-awareness	3.13(1.03)	2.99(1.08)	3.23(0.97)
other-dependent narcissism	3.67(1.06)	3.33(1.11)	3.91(0.95)
dysfunctional impulsivity	3.10(0.92)	3.01(0.86)	3.16(0.96)
exaggerated self-presentation	2.56(1.19)	2.24(1.10)	2.78(1.20)
low tolerance to anger	2.69(1.22)	2.27(1.03)	2.99(1.25)
Total EGSS	2.92(0.73)	2.61(0.67)	3.15(0.68)

SD: Standard Deviation

4.2 EGSS Variation By School

Independent samples t-test was conducted to verify whether there is a difference in EGSS according to school characteristics. As shown in Table 5, there is a statistically significant difference in EGSS by school characteristics ($t=-8.05$, $p<.001$), and internationalized alternative schools (mean 2.61) have a lower EGSS by 0.54 than public schools (mean 3.15).

Table 5. EGSS Variation By School

Category	Mean	SD	Mean difference	t	p
Intl.	2.61	0.67	-0.54	-8.05***	<.001
Public	3.15	0.68			

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

4.3 EGSS Variation By Sex

To test whether there is a difference in EGSS by sex, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The results are shown in Table 6. In internationalized alternative schools, the mean EGSS for males(2.74) was statistically significantly higher than that for females(2.46), while there was no significant difference between males and females in public schools.

Table 6. EGSS Variation By Sex

Category		Mean	SD	Mean difference	t	p
Total	F	2.92	0.76	-0.014	-0.195	.845
	M	2.93	0.70			
Intl.	F	2.46	0.62	-0.279	-2.79**	.006
	M	2.74	0.69			
Public	F	3.20	0.69	0.116	1.33	.185
	M	3.09	0.67			

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001 F: female, M: male

4.4 EGSS Variation By Grade Level

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to test whether there were differences in EGSS scores based on grade level characteristics. The results are shown in Table 7. There was a significant difference in the overall mean(F = 53.7, p < .001), as well as in the mean of internationalized alternative schools(F = 11.7, p < .001) and public schools(F = 71.1, p < .001) by grade. In both internationalized alternative school and public schools, 8th graders had the highest mean, followed by 9th graders, and 7th graders had the lowest mean. The mean value for 7th graders in internationalized alternatives increased from 2.30 to 2.79 in 8th grade and then decreased to 2.65 in 9th grade. The mean value for 7th graders in public schools increased from 2.60 to 3.59 in 8th grade and then decreased to 3.16 in 9th grade.

Table 7. EGSS Variation By Grade Level

	grade	N	Mean(SD)	F	p
Total	7	129	2.48(0.55)	53.7***	<.001
	8	166	3.24(0.74)		
	9	125	2.96(0.64)		
Intl.	7	52	2.30(0.47)	11.7***	<.001
	8	74	2.79(0.76)		
	9	49	2.65(0.62)		
Public	7	77	2.60(0.57)	71.1***	<.001
	8	92	3.59(0.49)		
	9	76	3.16(0.57)		

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

V. DISCUSS AND CONCLUSION

Cho(2017)'s study measured and compared the extent of 8th grade syndrome among students in internationalized alternative schools and public schools to determine how differences in educational settings affect 8th grade syndrome in students with the same socio-cultural background.

The results of the analysis are as follows. First, the descriptive statistics analysis showed that the mean value of internationalized alternative schools was 2.61 and the mean value of public schools was 3.15, and among the six sub-factors that comprise the EGSS, both internationalized alternative schools and public schools had the highest mean values of other-dependent narcissism. Second, an independent samples t-test was conducted to verify whether there is a difference in EGSS according to school characteristics, and the results showed that there is a significant difference in EGSS according to school characteristics, with internationalization alternative schools(mean 2.61) being 0.54 lower than public schools(mean 3.15). Third, an independent samples t-test was conducted to verify whether there was a difference in EGSS by sex, and the results showed that the mean EGSS of males in internationalized alternative schools(2.74) was statistically significantly higher than that of females(2.46), but there was no significant difference between males and females in public schools. Fourth, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to test whether there were differences in EGSS based on grade characteristics, and both internationalized alternative schools and public schools showed significant differences by grade. In both internationalized alternative schools and public schools, 8th graders had the highest mean value, followed by 9th graders, and 7th graders had the lowest mean value.

The discussion follows. First, the highest mean value of other-dependent narcissism among the sub-factors of the EGSS indicates that adolescents at this age are immature in loving and valuing themselves, instead of attaching great importance to the evaluation and relationships of others. Therefore, it is possible to alleviate the problems of 8th-grade syndrome by encouraging adolescents to develop independence from excessive relationship dependence. Second, the average value of EGSS was lower in internationalized alternative schools compared to public schools. In other words, it was confirmed that the difference in school environment affects the degree of the 8th-grade syndrome in the same socio-cultural background. In particular, it can be seen that the free, self-directed, and holistic educational atmosphere of internationalized alternative schools is a factor that mitigates the 8th-grade syndrome. Third, the mean EGSS of female students in internationalized alternative schools(2.46) was statistically significantly lower than that of male students(2.74). This suggests that the educational environment of internationalized alternative schools has a greater impact on mitigating the 8th-grade syndrome in females. Fourth, the mean values of the EGSS were highest in grade 8, followed by grade 9, and lowest in grade 7 in both internationalized and public schools. In other words, as the name suggests, the 8th-grade syndrome is most severe in grade 8. This is consistent with the study by Cho(2017). The significance of this study is that it validated the EGSS developed by Cho(2017) by applying it to actual students. However, there are limitations in that the number of students in internationalized alternative schools was not large enough to secure a sufficient sample, and the six sub-factors of the EGSS were not specifically analyzed.

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